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Insect life in the Maltese Islands – *Quo vadis?*

Guido BONETT¹

Worldwide, biodiversity is on the decline. In fact, over 40% of the terrestrial invertebrate species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List are classified as threatened with extinction.

The Maltese Islands are no exception, with population densities of a number of indigenous insects steadily declining in these last two decades. This is particularly evident in charismatic species including butterflies and moths which have been monitored and studied over a longer period of time. *Maniola jurtina* (Meadow Brown) which could be observed in the thousands up to 20 years ago is now virtually extinct from Malta, with some remnant populations still existing in Gozo. The same applies to *Pararge aegeria* (Speckled Wood) which was encountered in all valleys and gardens in the Maltese Islands up to a few years ago. *Lycaena phlaeas* (Small Copper) vanished for many years, with a small number of records being noted again in these last couple of years.

Buskett is the main and largest forested area found in Malta, which was originally planted but now to some extent, self-regenerating. This unique habitat is home to a wide diversity of species and is being used as a case study to address management issues in relation to the decline of insect populations. This communication discusses the major factors in the fall-off of Malta's insect populations, chief amongst which are the ubiquitous use of pesticides, perchlorates being released in the environment as a result of the huge amounts of fireworks, the spread of monoculture crops, urbanisation and habitat destruction. Potential conservation actions to address and reduce this population decline need to be urgently addressed.

¹ Icarus, No. 53, Triq San Publiju, Naxxar, Malta